

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
on Governor's proposed Midterm Budget adjustments FY 2017

IN OPPOSITION

H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE
30, 2017

Re: Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget

February 18, 2016

Diane Frost, Stamford, CT

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Diane Frost. I am a registered voter in Stamford. I am writing to you to share my great concerns about the Governor's proposed midterm budget adjustments as they relate to deep cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). I am one of more than 107,963¹ people who have received mental health, and/or substance abuse services from the Department of Mental Health Services in order to be well and live in my community between 2013 and 2014 and beyond.

Every person living with and managing mental illness needs the close to \$72 million of proposed cuts into fiscal years 2015 and 2016, to be healthy and productive. Mental illness requires a formidable spirit and services that cost money to be successful.

Please understand that I agree with cost-cutting. I continue to live my life on a shoe-string budget. To live, I have the right to receive equitable care in my community. Parity says this is a fact. I say this is my life. I and my peers need \$3 million worth of Community Care Teams, \$16 million to private non-profits, \$17 million restored to services in 2016 (currently cut through annualizing deficit mitigation cuts and budget lapses), and \$585,000 to keep Regional Mental Health Boards funded, so that we may continue to have a voice in Connecticut state policy making.

I have come before you to tell you that supportive housing, case management, access to medication, counseling and a means of advocating for me has been my lifeline. Without support I wouldn't be here in conversation with you. Services are necessary to me and my peers.

Thankfully, I function so well that I live independently, apply what I have learned in experience in my work as a recovery support specialist at a Connecticut Local Mental Health Agency, *Bridges... a Community Support System*.

I'm sure that the services that that have helped me stay in my community will ensure that my peers will remain active and productive in their communities, as well. I feel good doing this and coming so far in wellness. My struggle is the daily grind. I get tremendous joy from working on my health, akin to profession. I happily achieve it with my time, energy and strength.

¹ CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). 2014 Report on Statewide Priority Services. Retrieved from <http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/lib/dmhas/eqmi/priorityservices.pdf> 2/18/16.

My recovery is my life's work. I have learned to draw strength from my experience. In doing so, I have committed years to study toward gaining my Master's in Social Work from Fordham University. This is a challenge I know I can handle. I intend to gain knowledge and pass strength in adversity on to other people as a career. Advocacy is my dream career in well-being. This is why I am speaking with you.

Please ensure that my peers coming out of crisis and into their recovery don't lose services. That I am having this conversation with you means that services are in jeopardy. Mine and my peers hope that our productivity and contributions within society matter to you. Our respective recovery allows us to be well, to pursue education, working, and participate in family and friendship. Our hopes for such personal fulfillment will falter if funding for essential services is cut. Please ensure in your decision that access is available tomorrow. Count this funding as necessity as it was for me and is for many, still.

I have, as well as my peers now, hoped to live, work and grow in my community. We need access services to be as well as we can be.

Thank you, Diane Frost